

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Interim sheriff has no small task ahead

With only 10 months, Scott looks to reforms

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Interim Sheriff John Scott is not wasting any time.

Given only 10 months — at most — to lead the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department out of the mess left behind by now-retired Sheriff Lee Baca, he is scrambling to put reforms in place.

"There's a new sheriff in town," Scott told the Los Angeles News Group during an interview this week at LASD headquarters in Monterey Park.

"I'm committed to transparency, to ethical behavior, to ensuring that all of the rules are enforced," he added. "We don't break the law to enforce the law."

Scott served 36 years at the LASD before retiring in 2005, frustrated with the direction it was going in.

"It was painful," he said about

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leaving then. "I couldn't be an effective change agent — there were too many who outranked me."

When Baca unexpectedly left, Scott seized his chance to return to the LASD, even though it meant abandoning — albeit temporarily — the Orange County Sheriff's Department, where he is second-in-command.

"There is passion here," Scott said of the LASD. "This is my home, and I want to see it restored."

As a boy, Scott had idolized Sheriff John, from a 1950s television show. As soon as he became eligible — literally on his 21st birthday — he took the test to apply to LASD.

Through the years, he worked in the jails and out on patrol, and even had a stint leading the SWAT team.

He helped plan security for the 1984 Olympics and was in charge of the emergency operations center during the 1994 Northridge Earthquake.

His last assignment was taking command of the county's jail system, the largest in the nation. He retired soon after, disillusioned that key promotions were going to people who, he felt, "had their own personal agenda" and which were "not in the best interest of the department."

Scott didn't stay retired for long, though, because the Orange County Sheriff's Department hired him as a consultant and then as second-in-command to Sheriff Sandra Hutchens in the aftermath of the scandals involving former Sheriff Mike Carona.

Hutchens believes Scott will know how to begin fixing the problems at LASD, because he did the same at the OCSO.

She wants him, however, to return to Orange County once his interim appointment is over.

"I told the Board of Supervisors it's a loan," she said.

At Scott's swearing-in ceremony, his 86-year-father beamed.

"He's done real good by himself," John D. Scott said. "He's accomplished a lot, and he's led a good life. I'm real proud of him."

"He's got his sights set pretty high, and he wants to help the people."

Scott's wife, Alice, also served 30 years in the LASD but — unlike her husband — isn't interested in being pressed back into service.

"Work is a four-letter word," she said with a laugh. "He'll be back to straighten the ship, but I'm just enjoying retirement."

New leadership style

Scott did manage to persuade retired division chief Neil Tyler to become his second-in-command.

"I don't think he's planning on coming and doing anything that's obviously flashy or necessarily immediately newsworthy," Tyler said. "He's not talk-

ing about shaking the place to its core, because the vast majority of the department are dedicated people who want to do the job right.

"John's going to provide the kind of leadership that everybody will look up to and be appreciative of," he added. "John hasn't got a selfish bone in his body, and he hasn't got a mean-spirited bone in his body so his management style is going to seem very open and friendly, but that doesn't mean he'll be weak, by any stretch — he has a spine of steel."

If voters elect a new sheriff on June 3, the Board of Supervisors could remove Scott and put the sheriff-elect in charge. If there is a runoff election, however, Scott will step down Dec. 1 when the new sheriff is sworn in.

Keenly aware of those deadlines, Scott immediately got to work.

"He spoke to me three hours after he was appointed and explained to me what he wanted done on several things, including letting executive staff

know he wanted to meet at a certain date, a certain time, after he was in office," said Capt. Mike Parker, the department's new spokesman.

"I'm very much action oriented," Scott said. "Some of the symbolic things that existed out there, I dealt with. The cigar room, viewed as an exclusive club — is gone. The field deputy program, which had four individuals reporting directly to Baca, and yet the rest of the department wasn't really

privy to what they were doing, other than community outreach. That's gone, too. It shouldn't be based on personal connections."

He's creating a new command that "deals with inspections, audits, monitoring" as well as a "Sheriff's Cadre," which would be made up of a group of retired personnel who would assess operations and make recommendations.

Finally, Scott wants to ensure a seamless transition to the new sheriff.

He plans to meet with all

of the candidates and try to put some of their initiatives in place before they arrive — something that would not have happened if the sheriff were running for re-election.

"Basically, I want to see what their plan of action is, and if there are any pieces that I could put into place earlier that might assist in a smoother transition," Scott said. "I want to get us to that point on Dec. 1 where the elected sheriff steps in, and a lot of his initiatives are already un-

derway."

When those initiatives end up becoming successful, Scott will not be the one to get the credit, but he doesn't care.

"I have no ego," he said, and pointed to a Ronald Reagan quote embossed in glass on his desk — one of the few personal items he brought to his temporary new office.

The quote said: "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he does not mind who gets the credit."

Foster mother gets 25-to-life in death

BY GARRETT THEROLF
AND MATT STEVENS

A foster mother convicted of second-degree murder in the beating death of a 2-year-old girl was sentenced Friday to 25-years-to-life in state prison.

Kiana Barker, 34, who had been trying to adopt Viola Vancief in 2010, severely beat the toddler and later called 911 to report that the girl had stopped breathing, prosecutors allege.

In October, a jury found Barker guilty of second-degree murder, assault on a

child causing death and child abuse.

The case was the latest in a years-long series of problems for United Care, a non-profit foster agency that contracted with Los Angeles County at the time of Viola's death and had placed the girl with Barker.

After the child's death, the county terminated its contract with United Care.

A witness said Barker had burst into Viola's room after hours of heavy drinking and beat her. When Barker was pulled away, the little girl was on the floor, struggling.

[See Foster death, AA4]

Case spurred change by L.A. County

Sat 2-22-14 L.A. Times

[Foster death, from AA1] gling to breathe, the witness said.

Though doctors at a hospital attempted to revive the child, prosecutors said she was dead on arrival.

She had suffered "extensive blunt force trauma," the district attorney's office said in a statement.

A motion filed with the court at sentencing said the trauma was caused by "multiple repeated blows by an adult, exerting maximum force."

Ultimately, it was determined that Viola — placed in child care because her biological mother was a crack addict and prostitute — had died of massive bleeding in her chest cavity, prosecutors said.

Authorities said Barker eventually told investigators that Viola had become jammed in a bed frame and

that she may have accidentally hit the girl with a hammer while trying to free her.

"It's hard to imagine a mother beating her child to death," Deputy Dist. Atty. Pak Kouch said after Barker's conviction.

Kouch described Barker as a violent woman who beat her biological daughter with a belt and ultimately "whooped and whooped and whooped on Viola," killing her.

The child's death focused attention on the Department of Children and Family Services, whose officials could not initially explain how the child came into the care of Barker and her then-boyfriend James Dewitt Julian.

Shortly after Viola's death, The Times reported that Barker had been the subject of five previous child-abuse complaints, in-



AL SEIB Los Angeles Times

KIANA BARKER was convicted of second-degree murder in beating death of Viola Vancief, 2.

cluding one substantiated allegation that she had severely neglected her own child in 2002.

Julian had been convicted in 1992 of armed robbery — a fact that should

have disqualified him from living in a home certified for foster care.

Los Angeles County supervisors later voted to develop an investigations unit and subsequently terminated the county's relationship with United Care.

In December, The Times also reported that at least four children in the county had died as a result of abuse or neglect over the last five years in homes overseen by private agencies such as United Care.

Responding to the report, county officials launched a review of the criminal clearance process for foster parents selected by private agencies.

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Times staff writer Jill Cowan contributed to this report.

A better Sheriff's Dept.

L.A. has a window of opportunity to make smart and lasting changes in how the sheriff does his work.

THE LOS ANGELES County Board of Supervisors can create a citizens commission to oversee the sheriff, in an effort to prevent the kinds of abuses that have been the subject of news reports, lawsuits and indictments over the last several years. But let's be clear at the outset: Neither the board nor any citizens commission it creates will have the power to reward or punish the sheriff or to give him orders.

So is there any value to adding a new layer of review? There can be, if oversight is designed with care and with a deep understanding of the particular challenges presented by the office of sheriff.

Those challenges begin with the fact that under the state Constitution, the sheriff is independently elected, shielding him from the kind of direct accountability that, for example, the Los Angeles police chief owes to the city's Police Commission under the city charter and various ordinances.

In the long run, perfect oversight — at least, as perfect as these things can ever be — may mean ballot measures that modify the sheriff's independence, such as limiting his terms or making his office an appointed

one. But there remains some utility in more immediate measures, such as creating a commission that meets regularly and in public, works with the inspector general to track the department with regular reports, requests that the sheriff appear and respond to questions, sets goals and timetables for improvements and generally provides a forum, dedicated to just the Sheriff's Department, for the public to monitor the progress and share concerns.

Such public oversight would be too limited if the commission were appointed by, and answerable only to, the Board of Supervisors. To design an effective commission, care would have to be taken in designating the number of members, their tenure, whether they could be removed, how often they would be required to meet and a host of other factors that seem minuscule but in the aggregate are crucial.

That kind of design can be painstaking, but it is imperative. With no incumbent running in the June 3 election, with seven candidates ready to debate the sheriff's powers, with two supervisors termed out and two more to follow in 2016, with Department of Justice officials weighing what to do about the culture of abuse and defiance in the department, Los Angeles has a rare window of opportunity to make smart and lasting changes in how the sheriff does his work. County leaders should think, debate and design before they act — but they should act, soon, while they have the chance.

Civilian oversight for sheriff?

WED 2-26-14 LA Times
New inspector general, interim sheriff to study setting up such a panel.

BY ABBY SEWELL

Los Angeles County supervisors voted Tuesday to ask the newly appointed inspector general of the Sheriff's Department to work with interim Sheriff John L. Scott to study setting up a civilian commission that would oversee the department.

The officials will look into how such a body could be structured and weigh in on whether they advise creating it at all. They will report back to the board by the end

of June.

The supervisors also asked the county's attorneys to look into what steps would be required to create a commission with legal authority rather than a purely advisory body. That would probably require legislative action at the state level.

Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Gloria Molina proposed setting up a civilian commission in September, after the U.S. Department of Justice announced that its civil rights division would investigate treatment of mentally ill inmates. But a vote on the plan has been postponed repeatedly.

The other supervisors said they preferred to focus on setting up an inspector general's office for the de-

partment, as recommended by a blue ribbon commission that studied the issue of jail violence. That body did not make any recommendation on a citizen oversight panel.

The supervisors have hired former prosecutor Max Huntsman as inspector general and are in the process of staffing his office.

Tuesday's action will delay to at least July any final vote on whether to create a civilian commission, but proponents said they saw the move as a step in the right direction.

"I am encouraged that the board is comprehending how reform can and should take place," Ridley-Thomas said in an interview. "Legal authority is accountability with a capital A. That which we are limited to is account-

ability with a small A, but it is accountability nonetheless, and it beats a blank."

Patrisse Cullors, founder of the Coalition to End Sheriff Violence in L.A. Jails, called the vote a "great step in the direction of ensuring our loved ones' human rights are upheld," although she added that advocates would have to "make sure that the county does not get swept up in its own bureaucracy."

Since the supervisors initially considered the proposal, federal authorities have indicted 20 current and former sheriff's officials, and Sheriff Lee Baca has stepped down, leaving an open race to replace him in June's election.

Shortly before announcing his retirement last

month, Baca voiced support for civilian oversight. Interim Sheriff Scott said in a recent interview that he would want to know more about how the body would be structured, but said he is "OK with the concept."

Several of the candidates running to replace Baca have also expressed support for the commission concept. So have the leading candidates running to replace termed-out Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

Yaroslavsky, who asked for the county's attorneys to look into the steps required to set up a commission with "teeth," has not supported creating a purely advisory commission.

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Failures in tracking of felons told

Probation officials concede problems with GPS devices at hearing held by L.A. County supervisors.

BY PAIGE ST. JOHN

Los Angeles County probation officials Tuesday conceded widespread failures in their electronic monitoring of felons, in which probation deputies were deluged with meaningless alerts while offenders went untracked for days and weeks at a time.

"This is a blueprint of how not to implement a GPS program," Probation Chief Jerry Powers told the county Board of Supervisors. He said deputies were not at fault, but blamed department administrators and the vendor who sold the county the service.

The hearing was triggered by a Feb. 15 story in The Times disclosing that deputies assigned to supervise felons with global positioning satellite monitoring received about 20,000 meaningless or mundane alerts a month. In some cases, depu-

ties said they ignored the messages, or worried that the deluge obscured serious warnings when an offender was about to flee.

The probation department told the newspaper that it lost track of 80 felons while they were on electronic monitoring in 2013. However, the department told The Times it could not immediately identify those absconders.

Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, an electronic monitoring critic who requested Tuesday's hearing, focused on problems with the county's leased equipment, including batteries that died. Antonovich pressed for emergency action to seek a new contractor.

"If there are not any vendors out there, we should not continue with a failed policy by subsidizing a failed contractor," Antonovich said.

But Powers faulted his own department for "inadequate and/or nonexistent" training and policies, including failing to require deputies to follow up when a GPS alert was triggered. He said department managers also failed to monitor the GPS

[See GPS, AA4]

[GPS, from AA1]

vendor and to resolve problems as the program grew to include prison felons released to local supervision under the state's efforts to relieve prison crowding.

He said changes were being made immediately.

By the end of this week, the probation department intends to reduce thousands of alerts created when offenders drive or ride through about 4,800 violation zones that blanket Los Angeles County, including every school and park. It will use software to calculate the speed of monitored offenders and ignore alerts created by those moving quickly.

The department ultimately intends to remove those default zones and establish prohibited areas unique to each offender, a goal set for this spring. Officials are also in the midst of creating a 12-person unit of deputies trained to use electronic monitoring. Some officers told The Times that they never were instructed how to use the system and were unaware that they could determine a felon's past or current location.

Los Angeles County officials said they were also tackling equipment problems they have had with the GPS ankle monitors provided by vendor Sentinel Offender Services of Irvine. An internal audit in September found that one in four GPS devices used to track serious criminals was faulty. The vendor attributed many of those problems to poorly trained county deputies.

Sentinel switched to more powerful batteries in December. In January it replaced ankle monitors with ones that could roughly determine a wearer's location using nearby cellphone towers when satellite signals were lost, a frequent occur-

In a separate interview, Deputy Chief Reaver Bingham said the probation department intended to increase its use of electronic monitoring once the current problems were fixed. Since widespread equipment failures were reported in November, that population has grown from about 200 offenders to a current roster of 331.

Los Angeles County uses Sentinel for three other electronic monitoring programs. The probation department monitors 100 adult probationers and pretrial detainees who pay for their tracking, and more than 550 juveniles sentenced to home detention or curfew. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department also has more than 300 jail inmates on GPS monitoring while they work at police substations or attend drug treatment programs.

In separate reports to the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff's Department noted its own problems with the equipment. Those reports show that GPS signals cannot pierce the concrete buildings where jail inmates work and sleep. In other cases, the buildings distort signals, creating false escape alarms.

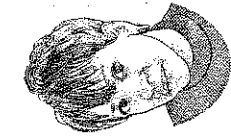
Sentinel is adding equipment to boost GPS and cell signals, and has encouraged the sheriff to widen the virtual security perimeter around police substations. That buffer would reduce false alarms but also allow an escapee to travel a block away before triggering an alarm from his GPS monitor.

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Sports camp is sidelined

Camp Kilpatrick, an acclaimed correctional facility in Malibu, will be rebuilt on a model that stresses education over athletics

SANDY BANKS



A sports program that brought national acclaim to a Los Angeles County probation camp is headed for extinction —

unless it can prove that it helps youthful offenders stay trouble-free.

For more than 20 years, Camp Kilpatrick in Malibu has been the only juvenile correctional facility in the state to field teams that compete against public and private schools in the California Interscholastic Federation.

The camp's football team inspired the 2006 movie "Gridiron Gang" and sent several players to college. Its basketball team has come close to being a regional champion. Its soccer program produced this year's Delphi League MVP.

But Camp Kilpatrick is being torn down next month and will be rebuilt on a new model — one that stresses education, counseling and vocational training over competitive sports.

It's part of a long-overdue shift in the county juvenile justice system, from boot-camp style to a therapeutic approach to rehabilitating young people.

Still, it would be a loss to the young men incarcerated at Camp Kilpatrick if sports are a casualty of reform.

The sports program is in limbo until probation officials consider the results of a soon-to-be-completed study into whether Kilpatrick's program actually reduces recidivism.

Former football player Guadalupe Flores doesn't need a study to answer that for me. Growing up in the San Fernando Valley, he was a perpetual troublemaker who was locked up at 18 for assaulting an ex-girlfriend. Kilpatrick roaches became his father figures, he said.

"They taught me how to discipline myself, physically and mentally."

Flores, now 20, learned to work hard, to trust people, to aim for victory but tolerate disappointment. Today, he owns a truck, rents an apartment and supports his three children with a job at a billiards company.

Chief Probation Officer Jerry Powers insists the new treatment model will provide those same things, in more structured, lab-tested doses.

"I get the value of sports," said Powers, who played three sports in high school. "It's great that kids at Kilpatrick had that opportunity. But it's time to

quantify whether long-term benefits extend back into the community."

In other words, does playing football for the Mustangs keep a kid from breaking into your car when he's not locked up anymore?

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The staff at Kilpatrick is understandably upset. Many camp probation officers are former athletes and proud of the legacy their teams have built.

"We came here because they had a program that offered a little more hope," said Glenn Williams, a supervising deputy probation officer at the camp. "Here you can be a mentor, a coach; teach them something beyond 'Keep your hands to yourself.'"

Some are cynical about the new approach, though it's been shown in other states to reduce recidivism, which has hovered for years in Los Angeles County at more than 50%.

Instead of living in giant dormitories, the teenagers will live in cottages in groups of 10 or 12, supervised by teachers, social workers and psychologists. They'll get individualized attention for their personal problems, and someone to track their progress when they're back with their families.

Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky thinks that's a great idea, but doesn't understand why the reforms can't make room for sports.

There's no guarantee that sports will keep a kid on the right track. But competition teaches them to

work with adversaries, he said. "And at the end of the game, you can shake hands and walk off with respect."

"If the new program doesn't include sports, well, maybe it should," he said.

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It's good to see the department focusing on helping kids instead of fending off scandals or flailing around.

Powers understands the attachment to the program. "If I was a coach, I'd be fighting like hell to save the sports program too," he said. "It's a fun way to interact with kids... But my job is to get probation officers to look beyond that and see the bigger picture."

But some of that "bigger picture" unfolds beyond the fenced compound at Camp Kilpatrick, when the boys are bused to play at schools in Chatsworth, Agoura Hills, Encino, Malibu.

Kilpatrick's league includes private and religious schools, and many of the students and parents there are rallying to save the camp's teams. Despite their criminal credentials, the Kilpatrick Mustangs have become known as fair, tough and well-mannered competitors.

When news spread that the camp teams were being disbanded, Viewpoint High senior Jack Leonard launched a protest petition on change.org. More than 750 people have signed it, most praising Kilpatrick's sportsmanship.

Playing Kilpatrick has been an education that goes

both ways.

"I am always amazed by their commitment to play the game with class and character," wrote Tim McAloon of Agoura Hills.

Suburban kids who used to joke, rather nervously, about playing the "juvie kids" have learned that their opponents are more than the sum of their crimes.

"I'm from a very white elitist part of town, and they're from the other side of the tracks," said Jesse Douglas, mother of Jack. "But we're all going to run into each other somewhere someday, whether it's on Venice Beach or Ventura Boulevard. If we're stuck now on stereotypes and judgments, we'll never get past that."

Douglas helped organize a pizza party at Viewpoint after one game; boys who'd been jawing at one another on the pitch wound up carrying on like best friends. "People started mingling together, and everything just kind of changed," Jack said.

After their final game against Viewpoint — which may be the last game that Kilpatrick will ever play — each Viewpoint player presented a rival with a copy of "Tattoos on the Heart," a book by Father Gregory Boyle about the power of compassion.

After awkward hugs, the Kilpatrick players headed back to their bus, leaving with a sense that they'd been judged by something other than the worst parts of their young lives.

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